

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, 1921 STAFF COTTAGE
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1121)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7440 Hawthorne Avenue
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-E
HABS CA-2800-E

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, 1921 STAFF COTTAGE
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1121)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-E

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located within the block bounded by Flores Street on the north, Laurel Street on the west, Hawthorn Street on the east, and Esperanza Street on the south. The 1921 Staff Cottage faces east toward Hawthorn Street.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
11S392635 N; 3754184 E

**Present Owner /
Occupant:** County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: From circa 1921 to 1926, four four-unit Staff Cottages designed in a wood Vernacular style with modest Craftsman influences were constructed to house staff that worked at the Los Angeles County Poor Farm. The County Poor Farm began in 1887/1888 as an agricultural facility that provided work, housing, and medical care for the indigent to relieve the overburdened Los Angeles County Hospital system. By the 1910s, an increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the Poor Farm, causing a transition from providing rehabilitative, short-term treatment for the impoverished to a long term patient care facility that eventually became the Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center. The Patient Ward Buildings were the first buildings constructed at the institution strictly to provide ward space for these chronically ill patients. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center is significant as an example of early twentieth century healthcare of Los Angeles County's indigent population and for its later treatment of those in Los Angeles County with chronic illnesses, both mental and physical. In 1995, seventy-six buildings located in the South Campus area of the former Poor Farm were determined eligible for listing as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Place, and as a result, the South Campus was automatically listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.¹ The Patient Ward Buildings were listed as contributors to the Historic District. The two extant Staff Cottages (1921 Staff Cottage and 1924 Staff Cottage) were listed as contributors to the Historic District.

¹ McAvoy, Christy J., Historic Resources Group. 26 July 1995. *Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, Primary Record and District Record*. Los Angeles, CA.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1921
2. **Architect:** No known architect is associated with this building.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present).
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present).
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with this building.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No original drawings for were uncovered by research for this building.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations to the 1921 Staff Cottage include: the replacement of original wood doors with non-character-defining metal doors on the east facade; the removal of four sets of concrete stoops leading to the four east entries; the addition of a concrete ramp to the east façade ca. 1980; and a one-story shed addition to the north elevation ca. 1960.

B. Historic Context:

Staff Cottages

In the 1920s, the most well-known of the Los Angeles County Poor Farm superintendents, William R. Harriman, began a large building initiative. The main impetus for much of the new construction was the planning of a Patient Ward area to accommodate the growing numbers of terminally ill patients being transferred from the Los Angeles County Hospital. The construction of these patient wards affected every department of South Campus.² A new power plant was planned to generate more heat and power;; there was a great need for additional kitchen and dining facilities;; and the laundry facilities had to expand to accommodate the sizable linen needs. Also, dozens of new employees had to be hired to staff the new ward buildings, creating a need for additional staff housing. A two-story dormitory was constructed (no longer extant), as well as additional “cottage style” staff housing. By 1926, four staff cottages designed in a wood Vernacular style with modest Craftsman influences had been constructed in an open grassy area at the northwest intersection of Esperanza and Hawthorn Streets, south of a larger area of multiple cottage style housing. Although there were various types of staff cottages constructed throughout the years in South Campus, it

² Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*, p.105. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

appears from historic aerials that there were only four cottages constructed as fourplexes. Over the years, the fourplex staff cottages were used for multiple purposes, including as office and storage space. Today, only the southernmost two of the four cottages are still extant (1921 Staff Cottage and 1923 Staff Cottage).

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The 1921 Staff Cottage is one-story with horizontal massing and a rectangular plan, with porch projections and a cross-gabled roof. The building was designed in a wood Vernacular style with modest Craftsman influences. The character-defining features of the 1921 Staff Cottage include the cross-gable roof, exposed braces and overhanging eaves, double-hung sash windows, and original wood clapboard siding.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the 1921 Staff Cottage is poor. Left vacant since the 1990s, its building components have deteriorated from earthquakes, neglect, and exposure, resulting in its current state of disrepair. The building has experienced a series of alterations over the years as the use of the building has changed from residential to office and storage. Exterior doors have been boarded-up, and original interior spatial configuration has been altered.

3.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The 1921 Staff Cottage has a rectangular floor plan and stands 14'-3" in height. The exterior building measurements for the Cottage are 84'-4" wide by 22'-3" deep. The net interior condition space, interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces calculates to 1,369 square feet. The building has an enclosed condition space of 1,448 square feet, and the total square footage for the enclosed condition space, including exterior dimensions and covered or enclosed spaces, calculates to 1,789 square feet.
2. **Foundations:** The 1921 Staff Cottage sits on a concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** The consistent use of the natural material of wood is a significant contributor to the overall character of the 1921 Staff Cottage. Overlapping wood siding emphasizes the horizontal massing of the building. Exposed structural elements including rafters, beams, and braces under wide overhanging eaves, triangular horizontal slat attic vents, and wide wood window and door casings are the primary trim.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The 1921 Staff Cottage has a wood framed structural system.

5. Openings:

a. Windows: The fenestration of the 1921 Staff Cottage consists of a linear arrangement of wood-framed, one-over-one-light, double-hung sash windows. These windows vary in sizes on the east and west elevations and, in some places, are paired. The windows are trimmed by flat wood boards with slightly projecting sills.

b. Doors: Entrances to the Staff Cottage are located on the east (primary) and west (rear) elevations of the buildings. The entries are distinguished by partial-width porches, each consisting of a projecting shed roof over a concrete stoop and steps or ramp. The projecting shed roof is supported by either Craftsman style beams and triangular braces, or wood posts and triangular braces. The original wood doors have been replaced by non-character-defining metal doors.

6. Roof: The Staff Cottage is surmounted by a low-pitched, cross-gabled roof sheathed in a combination of rolled asphalt and composition shingles. Exposed rafters are visible in the wide, overhanging eaves. At the center of the east facade, a front gable surmounts the main entrance and is supported by triangular, solid braces and has exposed rafters in the eaves. A gable is also present on the west elevation (rear) over a secondary entrance, which features triangular braces in the gable ends and rafters in the eaves. Side gables are present on the north and south elevations, which also have triangular braces in the gable ends and rafters in the eaves. All the gable ends are characterized by horizontal slat attic vents.

C. Description of Interior: The cottage was originally a single-story fourplex consisting of four individual residences. Alterations were made in the 1980s that converted the cottage from residential to office and storage space. The only existing original interior feature is the wood plank flooring; there are no other original spaces or features still extant.

D. Site:

a. Setting: The setting surrounding the 1921 Staff Cottage is generally characterized by mature trees, shrubs, lawn, and flower beds. This extant setting reflects the post-1925 era, when Superintendent William R. Harriman was expanding the campus. The building is located in a block bounded by Esperanza Street to the south, the parking lot for the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room to the west, Flores Street to the north, and Hawthorn Street to the east. The 1921 Staff Cottage is located in the northeast corner of this block at the intersection of Flores and Hawthorn Streets., To the immediate south of the Staff Cottage is a concrete paved area consisting of the 1966 Water Tank and the 1932 Pump House.

Historic photographs show shrubbery and flowers planted in manicured flower beds around the buildings.

- b. **Orientation:** The 1921 Staff Cottage is located in the northwestern portion of the campus in close proximity to the Patient Wards, the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room, and the Historic Power Plant Complex. The building is located at the intersection of Flores and Hawthorn Streets and faces east (primary) toward Hawthorn Street and the historic north-south campus axis of Erickson Avenue. Due to this orientation, the east façade of the building has the most architectural adornment. The west elevation, having a prominent secondary entrance, shares the same Craftsman influenced appearance with the east façade. The north and south elevations have less architectural details, being nonpublic elevations; however, Craftsman elements are also present on these elevations.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the 1921 Staff Cottage were discovered. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Diamond West Engineering, Inc. for the County of Los Angeles.

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E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

None

F. Supplemental Material:

Historical photographs
Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings
Aerial map

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the 1921 Staff Cottage was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to September 2009 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the 2008 certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Data Center project. Survey work and the creation of as-found drawings were carried out in 2007 by Ms. Wanda Ostermann of Diamond West Engineering, Inc., Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken in from July 2007 to July 2008 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, and Mr. Clarus Backes, senior resources specialist, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources analyst, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.